"DIVERSE BAPTISMS"

Heb. 9:10

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It should not be necessary to say and publish anything on the form of baptism, but when one hears how here and there confusion is caused in our churches by students who have been in schools which teach that immersion is the only right form, then it becomes our duty to help in clearing up such confusion.

All denominations, even the Baptists, admit that the word baptism is a Greek word which has more than one meaning as to form. In Hebrews 9:10 we read of "diverse baptisms" (Greek: diaphoris baptismois). What are these various baptisms? The context shows that they are all the religious cleansings in the Old Testament, which include sprinkling, washing, pouring, and bathing. All these cleansings are here called baptisms. When we add to this the consideration, that the letter to the Hebrews was written to the Jews from whom we have received the baptism, this is doubly important, because the Jews knew best what they meant by this word. If they called all those forms of religious cleansings baptism, we have no right to restrict this word to one form.

If Bible teachers know all this, why then do so many insist, that immersion is the only correct form? Does it not almost look like dishonesty? Not necessarily, but it does look like the mistake which

the apostles made about those scripture passages in the Old Testament that foretold Christ's suffering: they passed them by, and held only to those prophecies which told about his glory and power. Christ accused them of "slowness of heart" to accept **all** that the prophets had spoken, which was the cause of their confusion about Christ's death, Luke 24:25. It was a superficial study of the scriptures that caused confusion, and the same thing is true today. If we go to the bottom of things in the Bible, all confusion vanishes, including that about the form of baptism.

What are some of the scripture passages on bap tism that are being superficially studied?

1. Rom. 6:3-6. This is one of the most used passages by immersionists to prove the form of immersion, because in verse 4 Paul speaks of being buried with Christ. But they skip verse 3, which is the beginning of Paul's teaching on baptism, and shows clearly that the first meaning of baptism, and its fundamental meaning, is not burial but crucifixion: "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into **his death?"** And in verse 6 he emphasizes even the form of this death, saying that we were **crucified** with him." That is the first and real meaning of baptism. What Paul says in the next verse about burial is only an inference introduced by "therefore," as a second thought.

A close study of this passage shows, that Paul does not here wish to teach any particular **form,** but the **meaning** of baptism. Because if we wish to find

a form here, then the first form would be crucifixion, and the secondary form would be burial.

We are compelled to find here either **two** forms or **no** form. To pick out one of these forms as the Catholics and the immersionists do, and deny the other form, is inconsistent and confusing. (The Catholics have chosen the crucifixion form, and the immersionists the burial form, but both misinterpret this passage, because no form is intended by Paul to be taught here. But whoever insists that Paul does teach a form here, would have to take the first one as the Catholics do, because death is the fundamental meaning.)

2. Acts 1:5—"John baptized with water." Immersionists claim that this should be translated, "John baptized in water," because as long as we use the word "with," we cannot use immersion. It would make no sense to say "John immersed **with** water." That is impossible. So they change **with** to **in.** But in the Greek there is no preposition here before water, but only the dative case for water, "hudati," which is the dative of instrument, and cannot be translated by **in.** It must be by **with.** Consequently, we cannot use immersion here.

In other passages where a preposition is used with baptism, it is one that has the meaning of both **with** and **in,** and we would have the right to chose either one, if it were not for such passages as Acts 1:5 and some others, which show that we must choose **with,** in these passages, and that it would be consistent to do so also in the others.

3. Acts 8:38—It is often asked here, how the

eunuch came to ask for baptism when they studied Isaiah 53. The context in Isaiah shows that Philip must have explained to him the prohecy about "sprinkling many nations." What would be more natural here than speaking about baptism, and who would want to deny that Philip did not use the form which the prophet prescribes here? Isaiah 52:15.

4. Going back to Heb. 9:10 with its four forms of religious cleansings, it is well to note that only the sprinkling was done by the priests, all other forms could also be done by others. Each one could wash, or bathe himself, but no one could sprinkle himself. This was left to the priest, which shows that it was the most sacred of the four. This is not surprising when we consider that the cleansing by the blood of Christ is also called sprinkling.

So while the word baptism in the scriptures includes all these forms of religious cleansings, it is very evident, that sprinkling is the outstanding form with the richest meaning, namely death with Christ for the purpose of cleansing, as Paul explains in Rom. 6:7—"For he that is dead, is freed from sin" (not "he that is buried.")

It is therefore absolutely unnecessary and unfair to cast doubt on the validity of our form of baptism by sprinkling. We do not call immersion wrong, but we find more scripture for sprinkling. Both forms are good, but if one is better than the other, it is sprinkling. Besides, it is the form which can be used all over the world and at all seasons and all places, which cannot be said of immersion.